

## Aberystwyth University

### *Performing between Intention and Unconscious Daily Gesture. How Might Disabled Dancers Offer us a New Aesthetic Sensibility?*

Ames, Margaret

*Published in:*  
About Performance

*Publication date:*  
2012

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Ames, M. (2012). Performing between Intention and Unconscious Daily Gesture. How Might Disabled Dancers Offer us a New Aesthetic Sensibility? *About Performance*, 11, 143-158.

#### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Aberystwyth Research Portal (the Institutional Repository) are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Aberystwyth Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Aberystwyth Research Portal

#### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

tel: +44 1970 62 2400  
email: [is@aber.ac.uk](mailto:is@aber.ac.uk)

# About *Performance*

No. 11 2012



*In-Between Moves*

DEPARTMENT OF PERFORMANCE STUDIES  
THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

*About Performance* is published once a year by

Department of Performance Studies

University of Sydney

SYDNEY NSW 2006, Australia

Fax: +61 2 9351 5676

PRINTED BY

University Publishing Service

University of Sydney, SYDNEY NSW 2006

(email: [ups.info@sydney.edu.au](mailto:ups.info@sydney.edu.au))

PUBLICATION SITE [sydney.edu.au/sup/journals/aboutperformance](http://sydney.edu.au/sup/journals/aboutperformance)

ISSN 1324-6089

*About Performance* is concerned in the broadest possible way with the phenomenon of performance and with the processes involved in its production and reception. We are interested in all genres of aesthetic performance and live art, as well as social/cultural performance, ritual, and other forms of performative activity. The journal provides a forum for analysis, theorisation, and critique by academic researchers and performance makers. We welcome articles that bring theoretical perspectives derived from other disciplines to bear on performance practice.

Each issue of *About Performance* is devoted to a single theme and the journal appears once a year. It is published by the Department of Performance Studies at the University of Sydney and is produced in print and online; articles are peer reviewed in accordance with DEST guidelines.

COPYRIGHT © Department of Performance Studies

No part of this journal may be reproduced without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Cover photograph: Inmates at Cebu's Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center in the Philippines perform to Michael Jackson's "This Is It." Photograph by William Peterson.

# About *Performance*

GENERAL EDITOR Tim Fitzpatrick  
(email: tim.fitzpatrick@sydney.edu.au)

CO-EDITORS ISSUE No. 11

Amanda Card and Justine Shih Pearson

## INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY EDITORS

Christopher Balme (University of Munich), Jennifer Lindsay (Australian National University), Jon McKenzie (University of Wisconsin, Madison), Mike Pearson (University of Wales Aberystwyth), Alan Read (King's College London), Janelle Reinelt (University of Warwick), Ian Watson (Rutgers University), Takahashi Yuichiro (Dokkyo University, Japan)

## EDITORIAL PANEL

Jonathan Bollen (Flinders University), Tom Burvill (Macquarie University), Maryrose Casey (Monash University), Michael Cohen (Theatre Kantanka), Peter Eckersall (University of Melbourne), Michael Eigtved (University of Copenhagen), Rachel Fensham (University of Surrey), Jane Goodall (University of Western Sydney), Helen Gilbert (Royal Holloway College, University of London), Helena Grehan (Murdoch University), Julie Holledge (Flinders University), Mary Ann Hunter (Freelance consultant and artsworker), Jacqueline Lo (Australian National University), Tom McGuire (University of Ulster), Mark Minchinton (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology), Sophie Nield (Royal Holloway College, University of London), Maggi Phillips (Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts), Paul Rae (National University of Singapore), Nicholas Ridout (Queen Mary College, University of London), Kate Rossmanith (Macquarie University), Kerrie Schaefer (Exeter University), Edward Scheer (University of New South Wales), Peter Snow (Monash University), Peta Tait (La Trobe University), Joanne Tompkins (Queensland University)

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Amanda Card, Paul Dwyer, Russell Emerson, Laura Ginters, Daniel Johnston, Lowell Lewis, Ian Maxwell, Gay McAuley, Glen McGillivray (Department of Performance Studies, University of Sydney)

# About *Performance*

*In-Between Moves*

No. 11 2012

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Introduction

AMANDA CARD AND JUSTINE SHIH PEARSON 1

### Dance and the Distributed Body:

Odissi, Ritual Practice, and Mahari Performance

ANURIMA BANERJI 7

### Discipline and Pleasure:

Dancing Inmates in Cebu's Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center

WILLIAM PETERSON 41

### Between Machines and Humans:

Reflexive Anthropomorphism in Japanese Robot Competitions

YUJI SONE 63

### Choreographing the Airport: Travels in Thirdspace

JUSTINE SHIH PEARSON 83

### Learning the Lunge: Motility in Crocodile Country

KATE ROSSMANITH 105

### Talking to My Left Foot:

Performative Moves In-Between Self and Landscape in Yosemite National Park

SALLY ANN NESS 119

### Performing between Intention and Unconscious Daily Gesture.

How Might Disabled Dancers Offer Us a New Aesthetic Sensibility?

MARGARET AMES 143

### Epilepsy, Chorea, and Involuntary Movements Onstage:

The Politics and Aesthetics of Alterkinetic Dance

KÉLINA GOTMAN 159

### Bungaree and the Grand Corroboree:

"White fellow sit down all about; black fellow murry miserable"

MARYROSE CASEY 185

### List of Contributors 201

# PERFORMING BETWEEN INTENTION AND UNCONSCIOUS DAILY GESTURE. HOW MIGHT DISABLED DANCERS OFFER US A NEW AESTHETIC SENSIBILITY?

Margaret Ames

## INTRODUCTION

In her key essay “Strategic Abilities: Negotiating the Disabled Body in Dance,” Ann Cooper Albright critiques the production and appeal of the “supercrip” (Albright 2001, 60): the dancer who does not let physical limitations stop him/her from being a dancer, creating “representational frames of traditional proscenium performances, emphasizing the elements of virtuosity and technical expertise to reaffirm a classical body in spite of its limitations” (61). In the paradigm of the supercrip, the desire to be the same rather than other clearly positions the technically trained and non-disabled dancer’s body as the ideal of aesthetic beauty. In opposition to this, Albright proposes that we must “consciously construct new images and ways of imaging the disabled body” (ibid.). My argument in this paper runs parallel to this. I want to propose that it is exactly the disability and its marks of symptom—its signs of pathology—that produces a new and radical aesthetic. An able-bodied virtuoso cannot produce this aesthetic and the site of resistance to interpellation that is found in this kind of performance. Here I will argue that in *Brighton Beach*, by Welsh company Cyrff Ystwyth, the performer Edward Wadsworth positions himself and appropriates space as an individual; by this I mean that he appears before his audience as a coherent subject and agent. In reversing the order of discourse between able and disabled bodies, the non-disabled performer finds himself/herself at a disadvantage, but the political implications of this reversal are not my direct concern in this paper. Rather I am interested in the aesthetic affects generated by such a performance, and more specifically what happens in the encounter in the room—in how the performer produces such affects in his choreography, and how his action produces emotional resonance and intensity within me as facilitator and witness. What new territory lies here in-between standard notions of virtuosity and disability? What new implications for aesthetic readings of the body in performance emerge from in-between this performer’s specific corporeal characteristics and the ideology of the classical body that privileges, as Albright states, “ability within dance” (84).

In her analysis of a performance by the disabled dancer Emery Blackwell in a duet with Alito Alessi, “a dancer who has had various experiences with physical disability” (88), Albright highlights the power of Blackwell’s refusal of the supercrip convention.

Earlier I argued that, precisely because the disabled body is culturally coded as “grotesque”, many integrated dance groups emphasize the classical dimensions of the disabled dancers body’s movements—the grace of a wheelchair’s gliding, the strength and agility of people’s upper bodies, etc. What intrigues me about Blackwell’s dancing in this duet is the fact that his movement at once evokes images of the grotesque and then leads our eyes through the spectacle of his body into the experience of his particular physicality. (64)

Blackwell’s performance gave rise to an alternative form of watching for Albright, rooted in an awareness of the grotesque specificity of his body. In other words, the spectators were encouraged to see Blackwell’s body as it is and not as some triumphant example of self-overcoming or a denial of self.

Like Blackwell, Edward Wadsworth invites the audience’s scrutiny of his body and his physical engagement with the world through cerebral palsy (CP). As I will argue here, it is his intention towards each moment and his use of Eugenio Barba’s notion of the *extra-daily* body that both reveal the ineluctable fact of his daily limitations and offer us a revelation of embodied communication that refuses to be othered. By channelling the energy of intention, dilation, and extra-daily performative practice, Wadsworth manages to avoid, if not consciously refuse, what Albright termed “a static representation of disability, pulling the audience in as witness to the ongoing negotiations of that physical experience” (65).

## METHOD AND STYLE

In writing this article I am confronted with a problem of method and style that is embedded within any attempt to articulate an encounter with practice. In closely attending to Wadsworth performing, in attempting to analyse and describe what I see rather than what I hope to see or imagine, I inevitably fail. Any use of language to describe events that occur in the flow of relationship, physical presence, and creative response between people is doomed to reify those emotional and physical experiences. I am both observer and participant. I cannot be sure that what I describe is not what I imagine. I can make no claims to authentic witnessing as I am implicated in those events as participant. My desires, my history, my assumptions will influence any perception and observation and my ability to be a neutral, unaffected observer is compromised. How much of this is about myself is a question that must be acknowledged. My attempt to acknowledge these limitations and do the analysis anyway draws influence from ethnographic writing and from the

possibilities offered by phenomenological description. There is risk involved, but as the anthropologist Michael Jackson suggests:

ethnography helps us place practical and social imperatives on a par with scholastic rules and abstract understanding. It helps us recover a sense of those critical contexts of existence where knowledge is not a matter of how to know but a matter of life and death, when something is hazarded and risked in the process of coming to know, when “something is at stake.” (Jackson 1996, 4)

What is “at stake” in this work is not only my loosening of the bonds of academic disinterestedness, but also my network of trusted relationships. The risk is that in telling others about this research and its implications I reify Edward Wadsworth as both disabled and as object of enquiry, thereby dismantling his own agency. I risk doing exactly what I have determined not to do. My only hope of avoiding this ethical paradox is to remain alert to the fact of my position as participant in the work, as well as documenter and researcher. I do not stand outside and observe, but have direct input into what is done and how it is done. In contrast to Albright I do not comment on work that is made without my involvement. I do not reflect back on an experience received from others, but give an account of what seemed to appear for and before me in the very moments of its evolution. As such, I offer an account from a phenomenological position whilst using an ethnographic approach to the writing about what was given to me.

### **EXTRA-DAILY TECHNIQUE**

On the one hand, experience dictates that we cannot leave ourselves, and that our embodied selves as physiognomic expression will betray us. We cannot move beyond our ineluctable physical existence, and who we are is expressed through embodied relations, both with ourselves and the world. A performer is destined to only perform themselves in various versions of technical foci. On the other hand, the interpellative power of visible disability that assigns mythologies of deficiency, both moral and corporeal, alongside flavours of the heroic and the tragic through what Siebers describes as “the ideology of ability” (2008, 8), demands resistance. It is this resistance that Wadsworth finds in his appearance as performer. He finds this through an extra-daily approach to his daily appearance and action. According to the theatre practitioner and scholar Eugenio Barba, our daily techniques are those we are not conscious of: “we move, we sit, we carry things, we kiss, we agree and disagree with gestures which we believe to be natural but which in fact are culturally determined” (Barba and Savarese 1991, 9). The daily becomes extra-daily when it does not “respect habitual conditionings of the body” (ibid.).

As I read it, Barba’s “distance which separates daily body techniques from extra-daily techniques” (ibid.) refers to a performer’s ability to communicate with an



audience in a way that signifies their expertise. This is achieved through a complex layering of physical states that alter balance, increases the body's dynamic of posture and gesture, abstracts functional movement, and requires an increase in energy underpinning each action and each position assumed by the performer.

If we can bear the shock, discomfort, and the burden of looking and attend to a disabled body in this extra-daily condition of performance, if we can incorporate the possibility of Wadsworth's cerebral palsy as daily and as something that causes his physical existence to be regarded in terms of pathology, and if we can see the beauty of this pathology when consciously activated through the use of Barba's concept of the extra-daily body, may we also begin to perceive a wider definition of what it means to be virtuosic? Can we allow this aesthetic definition, this unstable territory that redefines the virtuoso, to appear before us and to be metabolised? Importantly, and in contrast to Barba, such virtuosity cannot be justified in terms of training alone: rather, it must be understood in terms of intention. Here the performer's intention is that each precise movement is performed to the exact point and with full knowledge of his actions. Wadsworth takes responsibility for articulating his selfhood: that junction between inner awareness of ourselves and the relinquishing of ourselves to others as they might find us; the point between inner consciousness and outward appearance; his being in the world. In doing this Wadsworth goes beyond his expectations of himself. From this perspective then, what does it take to perform this kind of theatre? What effort, what intention, and what techniques might be required? In what follows I provide a more concentrated analysis of these questions by focusing on two sections of Wadsworth's work in *Brighton Beach*: "Fighting against the Tide" and "Wobbly Head."

### **CYRFF YSTWYTH AND WADSWORTH'S *BRIGHTON BEACH***

Established in Aberystwyth in the west of Wales in 1987, Cyrff Ystwyth<sup>1</sup> was originally one of the groups that created dance performance under the umbrella of the community dance project for the west of Wales known as Dawns Dyfed. As part of a community arts organisation, the work was seen as an element of the provision of dance for the entire community, and this included dance performance opportunities for people with learning disabilities. Very quickly this membership expanded to include people with other forms of disability and non-disabled people. Until 2005 the company produced devised work driven principally by me, the group's convenor and director, facilitating the group's responses to individual memory, cultural contexts, dreams, myths, and their relevance and meanings for each member. Cyrff Ystwyth's work, like many community arts companies and projects with disabled people in the United Kingdom, brought "learning-disabled

---

<sup>1</sup> In English this means Flexible Bodies. It is also a play on the name of the town Aberystwyth which draws its name from the River Ystwyth which meets the sea there.

people into an arts discourse [but] the work of learning-disabled performers and artists [was] often mediated to audiences by nondisabled artists and facilitators” (Perring 2005, 177).

Meeting the group to discuss the next project at the end of 2005, I realised I had no ideas to offer and so asked the group if anyone else had a piece they would like to create. Adrian Jones, a severely learning disabled dancer and one of the founding members of the group, was the first to take up the challenge. Since then the working methods and principles of Cyrff Ystwyth have changed, with the group engaged in making work devised by learning and physically disabled dance artists, and with myself as director, responding solely to the material that these artists bring to the rehearsals. That first work created by Adrian Jones was called *Seagulls* and was performed by five dancers. The piece drew on his sharp observation of rural and coastal life in the west of Wales and was founded on personal experience and his take on the rhythms of Welsh culture and way of life. Seagulls were used as an embodied theme, with his observations of flocking and the splitting of flocks informing the choreography. Edward Wadsworth was in the audience and saw Adrian Jones’s first performance work. Wadsworth was inspired by the production and its relevance to him, so decided to become a company member.

## **BODY**

As stated earlier, Wadsworth has cerebral palsy and learning disabilities. The symptoms of this condition are not curable and are not transmissible. Wadsworth has the symptom of spasticity. Spasticity or hypertonus is characterised by paralysis or contraction of muscles. He uses a wheelchair and is dependant on full-time carers. However, the person in this body has had a life-long interest in performance, particularly music. He became involved with dance classes and later performing whilst participating in the Dawns Dyfed classes in his area. He began making *Brighton Beach* in 2007, completed and performed in the summer of 2009. Wadsworth is an aspiring artist. This work was autobiographical yet not chronological and used a strategy of disparate memories of childhood and youth that collided with each other. In turn these aspects of his past resonated with and against a constant undertow of emotional content that was never fully addressed; rather, the latter provided a texture that shifted between harsh despair and fear and surreal comedy, mixed with sudden delight and quietude.

Wadsworth’s disabled body, his instrument of existence, of action and intent, purpose and progress in the world problematises Barba’s notion of the extra-daily technique of the performer. How can a disabled performer mobilise this concept when the physical conditions of daily living cannot be distanced or set aside? The conditions of performance that make demands on Wadsworth produce his daily techniques of movement in front of an audience. How he comprehends and

produces a performance that communicates to the audience is a task of complexity and determination.

Living with CP can be very tiring. Edward Wadsworth requires support. When out of his wheelchair his mobility is restricted. He has restricted movement in his pelvis, legs, and feet. His upper body is not strong. His arms and hands, shoulders and spine are contracted and stiff. His weak core muscles mean he is usually slumped and his posture is pulled to the right in a marked leaning twist. His spatial awareness is poor, as he has difficulty orienting himself in relation to the topography of a room. Seeing what is ahead is difficult because of his posture and being aware of his peripheral space is extremely difficult. The amount of energy this performer must use in simply being present at a rehearsal is extraordinary. He can not replace daily attitudes and responses which are his necessary techniques for managing his environment with the extra-daily which terminates any habitual responses, as Barba advocates. He cannot engage in extra-daily attitudes and demeanours that waste energy purposefully and learn “maximum commitment of energy for minimal result” (Barba 1995, 16), in contrast to daily living’s economic use of energy. Wadsworth must spend large amounts of energy engaged in daily life and so the boundary between daily and extra-daily action and energy expenditure, and between controlled output of daily energy and the maximum expenditure in performance, must be renegotiated.

Barba’s commitment to the training of the performer is founded on techniques that require an energy radically different to those required in daily living. Wadsworth cannot do this: his daily expenditure of energy is already an economy of maximum commitment with minimal results. He must mobilise the extra-daily energy of maximum commitment through his daily body in order to manage the physical demands of any ordinary day. It is this energy that is Wadsworth’s currency for living.

So how does this performer produce the presence, demeanour, and intention of the performer demanded by Barba? In what ways does Wadsworth understand the rigours of training and the difference between daily life and the body in action in live theatre? To what extent does this performer’s particular struggle to create and perform his own work emerge from conditions where intention and action are rarely convergent? In order to answer these questions I turn to the first moment in *Brighton Beach* where Wadsworth encountered a predicament that we resolved by appropriating Eugenio Barba’s concept of the *dilated body*.

## **FIGHTING AGAINST THE TIDE**

Towards the halfway point of *Brighton Beach*, Wadsworth staged a sequence based on a dream in which he remembered a traumatic event on the beach as a child. His wheelchair became stuck in the sand and he was fixed, bound by his inability to

move the wheels through the sand as he watched the tide come in towards him. This moment of helplessness and fear developed from a group choreography involving all twelve Cyrff Ystwyth dancers, culminating in a compelling solo by Wadsworth. He began a small swimming motion whilst the other eleven dancers sank to the floor, gradually reducing their varied, individual choreographies developed from activities at the beach. Wadsworth's movement was undifferentiated at this point. As the other dancers stilled and formed a topography of undulating levels over the floor area, Wadsworth began to increase the energy of his actions. Using a swimming action indistinguishable from the other variations of activities of play and work by the sea, his movement began to demand attention, a strong call of increasing urgency from deep downstage right, close to, but just out of reach of the audience. His movements developed into a frantic and wild surging. He reached, pulled, and pushed his arms and then his whole torso in this swimming motion, in the process becoming barely coherent as the pathway of the movement took divergent tracks due to muscle contraction and uncontrollable writhing. The force of his action tipped the wheelchair backwards, threatening to topple it despite the brakes being applied and it having stabilisers on the back. The chair creaked and groaned. Wadsworth's breathing was loud and he gasped with the effort. His mouth and his eyes wide, a smile became a grimace with the sheer exhaustion of his effort that continued and continued. There was no respite. What had begun as mimetic had transformed into an experience saturating the senses. His actions both intentional and beyond his control merged into a suspension of daily routines that revealed something impossible. Here was an attention to the immanence of each micro-moment, emerging and producing the next. It was both horrific and thrilling, an evocation of human frailty and despair.

Yet this had not been the case in the devising and rehearsing process. Two dichotomous aspects were at work here. The first was the origin of the idea. Wadsworth drew on a mixture of observation, experience, and cliché when asking the performers to develop personal choreographies based on such things as fishing, sunbathing, beachcombing, looking out to sea, and swimming. His own choice of action came from the same source of belief in the illustrative and mimetic. It became apparent, very quickly, that none of this could be justified in terms of the craft of performance and the sheer weight of the normative image was smothering any hope for engagement. He sank into frustration and confusion. When I challenged him, the shock was visible; it was clear that he entertained the conviction that his own daily presence and thinking would be enough, both entertaining and compelling. The fact that this was proving to be false was threatening. For several rehearsals we struggled together to find the way to use his ideas and to transform his repetitive and daily reproduction of simple action into work that we could recognise as theatre. It became a fight to find the moment that could be seen for itself, dance as philosophy. What began to appear from this battle was buried experience, deep

anxiety, and a desire to deny the reality of this life—his life—as a former problem child and now supposedly deficient adult. What we were both keen to avoid was any recourse into art as therapy, or a repetition of beneficiary and benefactor. We badly needed a technical strategy, a means of anchoring the struggle in the discourse of technique and training. I remembered Eugenio Barba's writing on extra-daily technique and brought it to Wadsworth. He took to the concept at once; it made sense to him. He understood that he had to go way beyond what felt normal and what felt possible. He had to find a physical state that, until the moment of its appearance, would always be impossible. He had to exceed any previous perceptions of comfort, control, and knowledge; and crucially, he had to be willing to enter the territory of the unknown, and manage the psychic and corporeal pain that such journeying inevitably entails.

In his work Barba critiques "the inaccessibility of a virtuoso's body" (1995, 16): for Barba, this kind of technically proficient body remains distanced from the audience, as if the sheer virtuosity of the performer removes the obligation to communicate. Technique is displayed for itself alone rather than in a dialogue between audience and performer. Problematising Barba's ideas on virtuosity and distance, Wadsworth's expansion of energy in the "Fighting against the Tide" section presented the disabled performer as inaccessible, no longer understood as unable, or as simply doing the best that he can. In using the principle of extra-daily technique, which is based on the "dilation of energy" (*ibid.*), he presented movement going beyond recognition of shape, form, and function, into a dilated energy of commitment, suggestive of emergency and redolent with struggle. Barba defines the concept of dilation and the dilated body in this way:

The dilated body is a hot body, but not in the emotional or sentimental sense. Feeling and emotion are only a consequence, for both the performer and the spectator. The dilated body is above all a glowing body, in the scientific sense of the term: the particles which make up daily behaviour have been excited and produce more energy, they have undergone an increment of motion, they move further apart, attract and oppose each other with more force, in a restricted or expanded space. (Barba and Savarese 1991, 54)

Wadsworth's performance then became a critique of virtuosity, and yet, at the same time, made the dilated and extra-daily performer's disability inaccessible. As Marvin Carlson suggests:

Barba places the foundations of performance not in the situation of its enactment (its cultural "frame" or marking), but in a basic level of organization in the performer's body.[...] The spectator (about whom Barba says relatively little) responds to performance not due to operations of some cultural "frame", but because of a pre-cultural set of universal "physiological responses" to such stimuli as balance and directed tensions. (1999, 19)

In *Brighton Beach* a reading of the classical virtuosic was not available, but neither was a reading of the disabled freak show, the latter of which could have erupted at any point in the performance but was held at bay through the precise application of technique responsive to the conditions of cerebral palsy and learning disability, rather than as technique to master disabling symptoms. What appeared as accessible was the inevitable pain of exposure, not a cliché of the suffering of the artist or a universally perceived physiology that communicated across cultures. It was a simple side effect, the result of direct communication unmediated by acting or intellectual distance.

I believe the virtuosic is both engaged with and troubled by performances made by the members of Cyrff Ystwyth. Here an aesthetic emerges which is produced through and by the daily as communication at the same time as these daily bodies perform through practising extra-daily technique. The two conditions of daily communication and extra-daily virtuosity reveal themselves simultaneously in the body of the performers. There is a vibratory relationship between these physical states that causes my awareness to oscillate between emotionally saturated abstraction and concrete presence of individual bodies just as they are. The commitment of energy and intention in physical action by these disabled bodies is always readable as lack and as something broken, yet in performance it produces a precise engagement that cannot be read as what Carlson calls “transcultural physiology” (1999, 19). It is exactly within those precise actions done in those exact ways—with spasm, contraction, writhing, and all the micro-movements that are impossible for another body to reproduce—that the transformative power of this theatre is manifest. This is not faulty dancing, nor dancing by people who are unable to dance, reducing the choreography to a bad imitation of what it might be on another, trained body.

Wadsworth’s performance of “Fighting against the Tide” was an expansion of his original mime of swimming; it was an extra-daily swimming. A new virtuosic swimming emerged since only he in his embodied intention and specificity can move like that, with such cramps, contractions, use of breath, and shift of balance. His wheelchair appeared clumsy, clunky, and heavy—an unwieldy piece of equipment. Working in this heavy chair, Wadsworth opened new portals of aesthetic intervention, demanding to be seen; he illuminated possibilities of a new virtuosity. However, there is a contradiction here between how the observer perceives him and Wadsworth’s own relationship with the chair that is an unavoidable and important part of the work. He says it is part of him. He forgets that he is in it, as it becomes an extension of his body. It is very heavy and hard to move and he is not strong enough to stop a lighter, more aerodynamic wheelchair, such as the ones that other disabled dancers use. He has watched Candoco Dance Company performing and has commented on their highly mobile chairs, with lightweight frames and



minimal upholstery.<sup>2</sup> They glide swiftly, they turn tightly and they stop suddenly. Wadsworth's chair cannot be made to do these things. Yet he chooses this chair for dancing because it is safer. At home his chair is smaller and lighter, as he does not have to make complex turns or stop suddenly after a travelling movement. This awkward equipment becomes part of his body and frees him to work.

In "Fighting against the Tide" we are given information about Wadsworth and his physical presence but he eludes categorisation. Yes, we see and have to cope with his disability, yet it is through his extra-daily performative presence of himself, his choreography and his disability, that the performer and his work avoids a reifying frame as "disabled dance." This corresponds to Barba's notion that "herein lies the essential difference which separates extra-daily techniques from those which merely transform the body into the 'incredible' body of the acrobat and the virtuoso" (1995, 16). Wadsworth is disabled with cerebral palsy; and at the same time as he performed his disability through the extra-daily, his performance transcended the mundane, promoting a response to the aesthetic beauty of his performance. He is himself: a man bearing the mark of disability and not a professional performer. He is not a virtuoso; however, in the "Fighting Against the Tide" he successfully managed to engage what Barba refers to as "a complex extra-daily body technique which is not used to impersonate but to 'draw attention to his ability not to impersonate'" (1995, 17).

Wadsworth is not an artist yet. However, in this piece he worked to incorporate certain techniques of performance. When he was at a loss he seemed to impersonate himself. This was a redundant activity producing only clichés of pretence. He pretended to be in a time and place that does not exist, a dream. Without the resource of extra-daily technique, he drew attention to every lack and failure. I cringed. I was also angry, as I perceived this as a relinquishing of responsibility: with the privilege of time and a room to work in, the ethical demand is to use it wisely, to step out of the daily and to channel energy into actions that focus all thought on the craft of performance. My demand was that he should expect more of himself and undertake the work needed to achieve this. My demands became cruel. What might an untrained performer with cerebral palsy and a learning disability reasonably be expected to accomplish?

Barba claims that for performers "the aim is a permanently unstable balance. Rejecting 'natural' balance, the performer intervenes in space with a 'luxury' balance"

---

2 Candoco Dance Company was founded in 1991 by Celeste Dandeker and Adam Benjamin. The "About Us" page of their website (<http://www.candoco.co.uk/about-us/>, accessed 21 October 2011) describes how:

The company developed from workshops led by Celeste and Adam at the Aspire centre, and grew quickly into the first company of its kind in the UK—a professional dance company specialising in the integration of disabled and non-disabled dancers.

(1995, 19). Here Barba assumes that one's everyday balance is stable, whereas for Wadsworth it is not. His cerebral palsy and poor muscle tone configure his everyday balance as off kilter. He sits in the chair, he is slumped and slides down the chair, he leans heavily to the right. Everyday or natural balance for Wadsworth is already unstable; it has no luxury. In "Fighting against the Tide" he threw himself up and back, causing the chair to tip backwards. As the chair moved and he was close to danger, we knew that falling would be a catastrophe. He was in control but only just. His wild movements took him to a precarious edge and he felt this. How much does he trust in the moment of performance to be able to do this work without fear, again and again during repeated rehearsal and the two final performances? His movements were amplified, to the point of pain but there were no extensions, there was a wild play of imbalance and then sunken stability. There was forward motion, a jutting of the head as he moved through space, a push from arm muscles and abdomen to propel his weighty frame and wheelchair forwards. Not much of this was conscious; it was habitual and necessary. How then to transform this into performance? While already, always unbalanced in his everyday, Wadsworth nonetheless manages to destabilise his everyday way of moving further through his understanding of Eugenio Barba's extra-daily technique, as demonstrated in the two moments under discussion. For Wadsworth this meant being more than himself and pushing himself to expand, going further with reach and speed to the edge of his physical capability, yet without changing the choreography as his body could perform only a set pattern, prescribed by the effects of cerebral palsy.

An appreciation of this work is contingent upon acceptance of the condition of the body as it already is. There is no virtuosity to be found that is the result of years of training. Rather, the work is pared down to flux in intention, energy, and the coming into existence of each moment as it appears, visible through the condition of the performer. Wadsworth does not perform his disability but his performance is produced through his agency, and through the signs and material productions of his disabled body. I no longer see the disability as disabling, but instead see the action as something new. This is not disability performance. It is theatre found through extra-daily energy that places the performer in an extreme situation beyond the normal, even with his socially problematised physicality. It is found through his ability to destabilise himself and to exhibit the wildest version of his disability whilst not overcoming it. The work does not transcend cerebral palsy; it alerts the viewer to his performative energy or to Barba's *scenic body*. Here the scenic nature is profound because of the difference that lies in disability. Disability reveals a new terrain of expression, rather than merely stating its difference through compensatory acts of missed timing, incomplete trajectories and stumbles. It seems to assert an entirely alternative world of physical theatre that does not use the usual patterns of dancing through time and space and so makes a new claim on the territory of the virtuoso. It is precisely because of his specific body and extra-daily practice that Wadsworth's



performance takes on its own particular version of the virtuosic. It is crafted through internalising principles of extra-daily technique, and the performer turns his daily disability, the marker of his social interpellation as disabled subject, into an action of surprise, shock, and delight, and of passion and tension in performance.

However, this virtuosity cannot be transmitted to other performers, nor is it repeatable, as it depends on this particular disabled performer. How markedly different these conditions in performance are to Barba's, particularly his observation of pre-expressivity and most especially the *sats*, which are impossible for a performer such as Wadsworth to achieve. Barba describes this condition of *sats* as:

the moment in which the action is thought/acted by the entire organism, which reacts with tensions, even in immobility. It is the point at which one decides to act. There is a muscular, nervous and mental commitment, already directed towards an objective. It is the tightening or the gathering together of oneself from which the action departs. (1995, 55-56)

How does Wadsworth gather himself together? His visible summoning of the tremendous effort needed to control and release his body is anything but still and organised. Barba contends that the *sats* "engage the entire body" (56), but Wadsworth's entire body is already engaged in miss-firings and contractions. He has very little control over the action or containment of his posture and gesture. What then makes this an interesting performance? Are we looking at an aesthetics of theatre or are we voyeurs looking in on disability and accident? How does this body present the emergence of a new theatrical demand that we feel and engage with on a visceral level? The engagement does not produce sympathy, but recognition. Is this a recognition of alterity or of effort, of humanity, or is it an othering?

In rehearsal Wadsworth's movement was often mundane. He was often blocked and unable to create. But when he worked to find the extra-daily, something radically different appeared.

## WOBBLY HEAD

In this section of *Brighton Beach* Wadsworth continued to create from his childhood memories on the beach and of his struggle for independence. "Wobbly Head" came from his engagement with a Bach cantata and the same memory of being stuck in the sand. He worked in front of the company, with eyes closed, listening to the cantata. The music was very precise, bright, and intense. We all watched intently. I wrote quickly, jotting down as much as I could discern as intentional movement emerged from a place of deep introversion that he seemed to have moved into.

Later I read what I had written back to him. "Hands up to face/to nose. Settle, eyes closed. Legs treading, voices. Sleeping, hands on lap. Breathing. Twist, hand out to

left, tension, second voice. Turns. Turns. Turns and wobbly head. Smiles. He opens his eyes.” From this workbook scribble, Wadsworth produced “Wobbly Head.”

He began to learn the choreography, and he decided that it should begin as a duet with another performer who stood next to him, as he, seated in his wheelchair, led the dance. Their eyes were closed, so Jo Strong, a female dancer with Cyrff Ystwyth, touched the back of her hand against Wadsworth’s in order to sense when he was moving. They were close. They were sensing each other. However, Wadsworth could not remember the order of the choreography, his memory for movement and spatial awareness being poor. He depended on Strong’s memory. This duet passed responsibility to and fro between the two performers. Her responsibility was memory, his was timing; hers was direction in space, his was to develop the coherence of the choreography and reveal it to her. As I watched I began to recognise this new occurrence in the room. Through their shared concentration and awareness of each other they developed an embodied technique to manage the problem of their different abilities and create the performance. I began to read and comprehend this dance as a poetics of difference. They engaged so closely, yet through necessities of physiognomy they produced the movements differently. We developed the work by bringing in each dancer, one by one. Each picked up the choreography at the point they arrived in the group. They learnt the movements and the timing, and each dancer served to underline the power of differences incrementally. As every position and action was repeated, so the complexity grew, as no dancer could or would perform the piece in the same manner and demeanour as any other. Despite the simple instructions, which were also verbalised as part of the piece, no dancer had the same extension, no dancer had the same perceptual information as to how to turn, and where to turn, or where to touch the nose, or in what manner to smile. Closely held together, they shuffled, reached, wobbled, and sensed the air with eyes closed, until the last section of each block of choreography, when (smiling) they slowly opened their eyes.

What is it that we recognised in this group dance with J.S. Bach as accompaniment? Was it Peggy Phelan’s “pleasure of resemblance and repetition” that “produces both psychic assurance and political fetishization” (2006, 3). As Phelan states:

Representation reproduces the Other as the Same. Performance, insofar as it can be defined as representation without reproduction, can be seen as a model for another representational economy, one in which the reproduction of the Other *as* the Same is not assured. (ibid.)

“Wobbly Head” seems to support her claim that in the performance economy the other is not necessarily the same. However, in this piece there is neither fetishisation nor assurance since there is no stability of order, or reproduction, and no agreement. Again and again the dancers display highly detailed differences in the act of

repetition. In the act of repeating, the surface of the image is disturbed by jolts of inconsistency, quirks, and miss-firings.

As Wadsworth and Cyrff Ystwyth perform, I recognise our common embodiment—the physical recognition of how to extend the left arm, and the muscular action of reaching through fingers, or rather, not reaching, but containing the energy. This recognition is very precise, embodied and experienced through a proprioceptive framework. It is entirely physiognomic. At the same time there is also an emotional turn of recognition that transmits difference. Wadsworth is not the same as anyone else. They are not the same as each other. I am not the same. Wadsworth's sequence of repeated movements on twelve bodies disrupts the framework of recognition. I see something that speaks directly to my lived embodied experience, yet at the same time he and they are not like me. They go beyond and resist the fetishisation of the disabled performer because “the Other as the Same is not assured” (Phelan 2006, 3). Yet how does this occur through the concept of the extra-daily? Again, what is it that we recognise?

Barba says, “training does not have a utilitarian goal. It is the amplification of the life of our body” (1985, 99). Theatre is “the moment in which a person begins to radiate energy on a level different from that of daily life. He therefore automatically attracts our attention, fascinates us” (71). In Barba's thinking, the moment when energy meets resistance through concentration of force is the “moment when theatre is born” (99). In Wadsworth's physical performance this radiation of energy is manifest through the concentration necessary to martial his resistive body and an expenditure of energy is necessary to accomplish this. His resistance against his own pain, his own exhaustion, which in daily life is always tempered, always held within comfortable boundaries, is in performance, abandoned. In performance he moved through boundaries of the rational and the reasonable. His necessary self-preservation from pain, reflex, habit, symptom, and personal trait were harnessed. All those particulars of embodied existence were present and heightened: these are this performer's tools and techniques; he has no others. The moment of recognition then is the point of understanding that this body *is* this performer and he offers it through a principle of extra-daily presence in performance. We recognise this. He is not other as the same, but other to himself. Through this process of self-othering he is not recognised as disabled but as performer, almost as if this is a different lexicon, a different order of things.

As I watch this work, I turn to an intra-psychic territory and this speaks to me of the subject's inevitable isolation. In this moment of extremity in *Brighton Beach* I read a philosophical struggle to connect, to bridge the gap between subjectivities, and to lose oneself in the act of offering oneself to one's community. This act is performed in the hope of recognition, between subjects. The philosopher Roberto Esposito explains:

*communitas* is utterly incapable of producing effects of commonality, of association (*accomunamento*), and of communion. It doesn't keep us warm, and it doesn't protect us; on the contrary, it exposes us to the most extreme of risks: that of losing, along with our individuality, the borders that guarantee its inviolability with respect to the other. (2010, 140)

Wadsworth exposed himself to danger. In Esposito's terms, he took the risk of losing his boundaries, of being dispersed, dismissed, and of being marked as "freak," both a known and unknown thing. In engaging with his audiences so directly and practicing the technique of revealing more and more of his conscious and unconscious self as embodied, he took the risk of disclosing what Esposito describes as "a meaning that still remains unthought" (149). This is both a potential and an impossibility. It is a secret that lies at the heart of recognition of the other: we can never really know who the other is. Working in *Cyrrff Ystwyth* does not protect us, it lays us open to the extremes of exposure "with respect to the other" (Esposito 2010, 140).

In *Brighton Beach*, and in *Cyrrff Ystwyth*'s work in general, we see the performer working with transition. A constant state of transition makes the destabilised and unbalanced appear as focus. Wadsworth is always at the point of rigidity or the unfinished. There is no completion of gesture, pathway, or shape, and everything is always changing; a dance that still remains un-danced. Change in muscle tone of the entire body is simply not under this performer's control; however, intention is. Intention towards the act is imperative as it often takes several seconds before the action or the moment of acting can take place, be accomplished, and completed. The production of the action is resolute determination towards its appearance.

Phelan believes that in "framing more and more images of the hitherto under-represented other, contemporary culture finds a way to name, and thus to arrest and fix, the image of that other" (2006, 2). In contrast to Phelan's critique, I wish to argue that it is both ethically important and aesthetically challenging for Edward Wadsworth and *Cyrrff Ystwyth* to frame themselves through the agency of devised performance and appear before audiences. Appearing as performers is the manner in which the members of *Cyrrff Ystwyth* mobilise out of arrest and fixity. It is the manner in which they reveal an aesthetic imperative drawn not on universal notions of a "common ground of all humanity before it is individualized into specific cultural traditions" (Carlson 1999, 203), but instead on one that seeks to reveal interruptions to interpellation. By framing themselves and being visible in performance, disabled performers produce an insistent siren call to watch and feel precise, saturated moments of live art.

Performing daily instability and neural interruption, revealing intention, and appearing as marked, as visible, and as subject with agency is how Wadsworth undoes the reification and arrest of disability. His application through dilation of

his ordinary physical self in performance of extra-daily technique has the potential to redefine virtuosity in the performer and to reposition readings of alterity, marking out differences rather than similarities whilst claiming visibility and particular skill.

## WORKS CITED

Albright, Ann Cooper. 2001. "Strategic Abilities: Negotiating the Disabled Body in Dance," in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, edited by Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright, 56-66. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Barba, Eugenio. 1985. *Beyond the Floating Islands*. New York: PAJ Publications.

———. 1995. *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*. London and New York: Routledge.

Barba, Eugenio, and Nicola Savarese. 1991. *The Secret Art of the Performer: A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*. London and New York: Routledge.

Carlson, Marvin. 1999. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.

Esposito, Roberto. 2010 *Communitas. The Origin and Destiny of Community*. Translated by Timothy Campbell. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

Jackson, Michael. 1996. "Introduction," in *Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*, edited by Michael Jackson, 1-50. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Perring, Giles. 2005. "The Facilitation of Learning-Disabled Arts: A Cultural Perspective," in *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, edited by Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander, 175-189. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Phelan, Peggy. 2006. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London and New York: Routledge.

Siebers, Tobin. 2008. *Disability Theory*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.